



## **HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR MUSIC: Personal stories of music education advocacy**

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# The power of music

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## *Abstract*

This article provides a short description of a web-based review of the literature relating to the impact of music on our emotions and behaviour and the practical uses to which music has been put in our everyday lives. The research report can be found on the website <[www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk](http://www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk)>

## *Key words*

behaviour, commerce, education, emotion, medicine, music, therapy

In 2000, I was commissioned by the Performing Right Society in the UK to undertake a review of research entitled 'The Value of Music'. The purpose of the review was to provide hard evidence of the effects of music to be used as a resource for musicians working in a range of areas who needed to justify funding for a variety of musical activities. The necessity for such a resource had become apparent as the place of music in the school curriculum, the provision of instrumental music lessons, funding for community music and the arts in general had come under threat from policy makers. On completion of the review it became apparent that the proposed title was inadequate to reflect the immense impact of music in our lives, and the final document was entitled 'The Power of Music' (Hallam, 2001). It is available on the worldwide web at <[www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk](http://www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk)> on the Projects page under the heading Power of Music Report. This advocacy statement is based, in part, on the findings of that review but also on my own experiences as a professional performing musician, a music educator, and a researcher into learning and performance in music. Outlined below are some of the key areas where music benefits humankind beyond its value in providing pleasure, stimulation and solace.

**Individual skill development:** Making music utilizes a great many skills and elicits a wide range of responses, more perhaps than any other human activity. Participating in making music requires the development of aural, intellectual, physical, emotional, communication and musical skills in addition to high levels of commitment, motivation and organization. The immediate time frame within which music is performed also elicits very high levels of concentration.

**Responses to music:** The responses of human beings to music go beyond 'sound'. Music

can be experienced physiologically (e.g. changes in heart rate); through movement; through mood and emotion; and cognitively (through knowledge and memories, which may be personal, or related to the music itself, e.g. its style or period). The fact that music is processed multiply and has physical, emotional and cognitive effects may be the key to its power.

**The functions of music in society:** Music has an important role to play in the functioning of society and has had for many thousands of years. No human culture appears to be without music. Singing, in particular, seems to be universal. Music is invariably expressed in relation to religion, celebrations and dance. It forms a part of all major occasions and celebrations, including weddings, funerals, pageants, rites of passage and festivals. It is also involved in the human preoccupation with seeking altered states of consciousness as part of ritual, individual day-dreaming, prayer, meditation or drug use.

**Communication:** In most cultures, music serves to assist in the process of increasing communication and enabling people to function together more effectively. It provides a means of expressing a wide variety of human feelings, love, sadness and a sense of belonging, which people sometimes find difficult to verbalize. Making music and sharing its meanings within a culture or particular environment leads to cohesion and the strengthening of social unity. It can be a powerful means of maintaining the continuity and stability of societies through folk music and songs that give accounts of myths and legends and record important events.

**The anti-establishment role of music:** Music can allow the expression of an identity that is counter to societal norms. In some cases, it can be a powerful tool for change. It can play an important role in unifying and exemplifying solidarity in those who are challenging societal norms and practices.

**Music in our everyday lives:** Throughout the 20th century, the development of the electronic media revolutionized access to and use of music. We can turn on the radio, play a CD or tape, or listen to music on video or TV with very little effort. Prior to these developments, music was only accessible for most people if they made it themselves or attended particular religious or social events. Now, people 'consume' music at an enormous rate. It has become an integral part of our everyday lives in a way that would have been unthinkable 100 years ago.

**Music in art:** In addition to the value of music as an art form in its own right, music has always played an important role in the theatre, TV, films and video. Many great cinematic moments appear meaningless without the accompanying music.

**The music industry:** Music is a substantial economic generator of income in most developed countries employing many thousands of people. To sustain this requires a supply of musicians, not only to perform, but to undertake those many tasks behind the scenes that nevertheless require high levels of musical expertise.

**Music and medicine:** Music has been used to support health education, reduce anxiety and pain in medicine and dentistry, increase relaxation, improve recovery rates, stimulate the immune system, support rehabilitation after brain damage, help children with progressive neuromuscular disorders, improve coordination and difficulties in movement, reduce the negative effects of Alzheimer's disease, tend the complex physical and spiritual needs of the dying, and help people work through grief and depression.

**The effects of music on early development:** Music can support the development of gross and fine motor activities, language skills, some aspects of somato-sensory coordination, some cognitive behaviours, and encourage sucking and promote weight gain in babies, particularly those born prematurely or underweight. Musical interactions between mother and baby help develop bonds of communication and facilitate speech development.

**Personal and social development:** There are demonstrable positive effects of involvement with music on children's personal and social development, particularly for low-ability, disaffected pupils and those of low economic status. There is also some evidence that involvement in music can increase social inclusion.

**Music for all:** Increasingly, musical opportunities are being created to enhance the quality of the lives of those who have aural impairments, learning difficulties and autism. Music has also been used to support the learning of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

**Music, commerce, advertising and work:** Music has always played a major part in our work activities, being used to coordinate movement, alleviate boredom, develop team spirit and speed up the pace of work. Nowadays, the commercial and industrial uses of music constitute major industries. Music is a major component of consumer marketing. It is effective in enhancing the appeal of products and in promoting memory for them. It has also been used to manipulate consumers' shopping, eating and drinking habits. The type of music we listen to may also be able to predict consumer behaviour. Ratings of the depressive content of the most popular songs in the USA have also predicted gross national product with a one- to two-year time lead.

**Endnote:** Most people hear music for substantial proportions of time each day. It plays a major part in our everyday lives and has major benefits in relation to our well-being and development. It is unthinkable, therefore, that it should not be studied by young people within compulsory education systems. In addition, the demand for music continues to increase. To support this, young people need to be provided with opportunities to acquire the necessary skills to work in the music industry.

## References

Hallam, S. (2001). *The power of music*. London: The Performing Right Society. Retrieved 11 April 2005 from <[www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk](http://www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk)> Also available free in hard copy from The Performing Right Society, 29/33 Berners Street, London W1T 3AB, UK.

*Susan Hallam* pursued careers as both a professional musician and a music educator before joining the staff of the Institute of Education, University of London. Her research includes a range of topics relating to attendance at school, exclusion from school, behaviour improvement, school-home links, ability grouping in primary and secondary schools, formative feedback in learning and instrumental music services. She is author of *Instrumental teaching: A practical guide to teaching and learning* (Heinemann, 1998) and *The Power of Music* (Performing Right Society, 2001) and is currently editor of the journal *Psychology of Music*.

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## **Abstracts**

### ***La puissance de la musique***

Cet article fournit une description courte d'une revue de la littérature Internet relatif à l'impact de la musique sur nos émotions et comportements, et les utilisations pratiques auxquelles la musique prend place dans nos vies quotidiennes. Le compte-rendu de la recherche peut être trouvé sur le site Web <[www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk](http://www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk)>

### ***Die Macht der Musik***

Dieser Bericht enthält die kurze Zusammenfassung einer umfangreichen Literaturübersicht zum Einfluss der Musik auf Emotionen und Verhaltensweisen sowie zum praktischen Nutzen der Musik im täglichen Leben. Der vollständige Report steht im Internet <[www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk](http://www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk)>

### ***El poder de la música***

Este trabajo proporciona una breve descripción de una revisión de la web sobre la bibliografía relacionada con el impacto de la música en nuestras emociones y conductas y sobre los usos prácticos de la música en nuestra vida cotidiana. El informe de esta investigación puede encontrarse en la página web <[www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk](http://www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk)>